

THE RESOURCE

HR INSIGHTS

VOL. IX, ISSUE III

magazine

from the eyes of industry leaders



Navigating Our New Normal

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Employee Performance

How to Unlock Remote Workforce
Engagement

Learning to Love Telecommuting

What Companies Get Wrong About Reskilling

Your Consulting RESOURCE

The Resource has recently launched a new division of the business, *Your Consulting Resource* - to help with Human Resources and “people issues” that you may be experiencing. We’d like to support you in addressing your challenges so that you can focus on making your business most successful. In gathering feedback from our clients, it seems that turnover & retention are definite pain points in this tight labor market.

Consider these statistics:

- According to Gallup, 51% of U.S. employees say they are actively looking for a new job or watching for openings.
- Further, 52% of voluntarily exiting employees said their manager or organization could have done something to prevent them from leaving.

Your Consulting Resource can help you maximize retention of your valued employees. We can serve as a confidential third party to identify employee pain points. This can be done through employee focus groups, stay interviews, or surveys. Once pain points are identified, we’ll facilitate development and execution of an action plan. We can also assist with aligning your leadership team, promoting your improvements, and establishing a continuous two-way feedback loop.

In addition to retaining your valued employees, you want them to be engaged! Engaged employees are willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them. They’re committed. They drive innovation. They work harder, perform better, and help others. Research has shown, time and again, that engaged workforces significantly outperform those that are not engaged. Yet, according to Gallup, only 34% of employees report being engaged in their jobs – which means more turnover and lack of retention. Furthermore, 13% are actively disengaged, which means they are not committed and generally unhappy (and they don’t hesitate to share that unhappiness with others). In addition, actively disengaged employees undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish, infecting *up to seven* other people. The remainder of the population is in the middle, and provide a great opportunity to move the needle on engagement - if you can create the right environment.

Your Consulting Resource has lots of tools and resources that can help you implement strategies to address important pillars of engagement - such as onboarding, employee recognition, two-way feedback, leadership, empowerment, teamwork, career growth, and more! Feel free to contact me for a FREE consult or coaching session.

Stay tuned! Future issues of this magazine will contain more information about other CONSULTING SERVICES that we can provide.

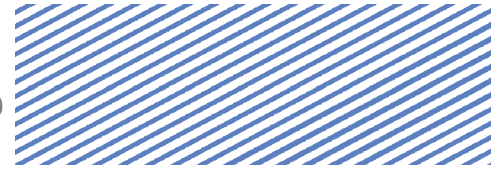
THE RESOURCE

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HR INSIGHTS

from the eyes of industry leaders

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LEADERSHIP

HOW *Leadership* AFFECTS EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

BY ALICIA WILDE

Although business leaders can have a substantial influence on their employees' work, their own responsibilities can make it difficult for them to drive high-quality performance effectively and consistently. Taken together, managers' varied responsibilities (which include ensuring team success, creating a positive atmosphere in the workplace, and solving complex problems, among others) can quickly become unbalanced. For example, a sudden shift in the market could take leaders' attention away from their teams, leading to a drop in productivity.

Leaders can stabilize their own resources by adopting different leadership styles for different situations. In one recent study, management scholars identified three main types¹:

- ✓ **Autocratic leadership:** Marked by a clear separation between leaders and employees, this style centralizes decision-making powers in a single person. Decisions are made quickly, and employees are expected to follow their instructions.
- ✓ **Democratic leadership:** This style uses a consultative approach in which leaders solicit feedback from individual team members. Decisions are made more slowly, with leaders considering the input of relevant stakeholders.
- ✓ **Participative leadership:** In this approach, leaders leave most of the decision-making process to trusted team members. Leaders provide guidance as necessary and delegate tasks to individuals based on their skills.

Organizations may use a combination of these leadership styles. Enterprises might take an autocratic approach to their investment strategies, for example, but use a more democratic style when developing products. When evaluating different types of leadership, managers must also consider how well their team members trust their decisions.



EVALUATING THE EFFECT OF LEADERSHIP STYLE ON PERFORMANCE

The study also found that each style has a unique impact on employee performance and identified various business scenarios that naturally lend themselves to specific styles:

- ✓ The autocratic approach is useful for driving short-term performance. In situations in which teams comprise new employees, authoritarian leaders are better at defining solutions to difficult business challenges.
- ✓ The democratic approach is effective in both the short term and the long term. Specifically, the feedback loop created by soliciting opinions from team members leads not only to higher productivity but also to higher morale.
- ✓ The participative approach is less effective in the short term but very useful in the long term, with a positive impact on employee performance. This style leads to a positive work environment in which creativity is encouraged.

These findings indicate that there is no single best style of leadership. Rather, leaders need to assess their goals and determine which style—or combination of styles—is right for the current situation.

WINNING EMPLOYEE TRUST

Trust in leadership is a critical factor in employee performance, regardless of which style leaders adopt. One 2017 study found a strong correlation between trust and employee behaviors that stimulate performance, including the willingness to stay with the organization long term.² With only 37 percent of respondents to one survey saying they considered business leaders “extremely/very credible,” it seems that one of the best ways to boost employee performance is for leaders to build greater trust with them. Leaders can win the trust of their employees by:

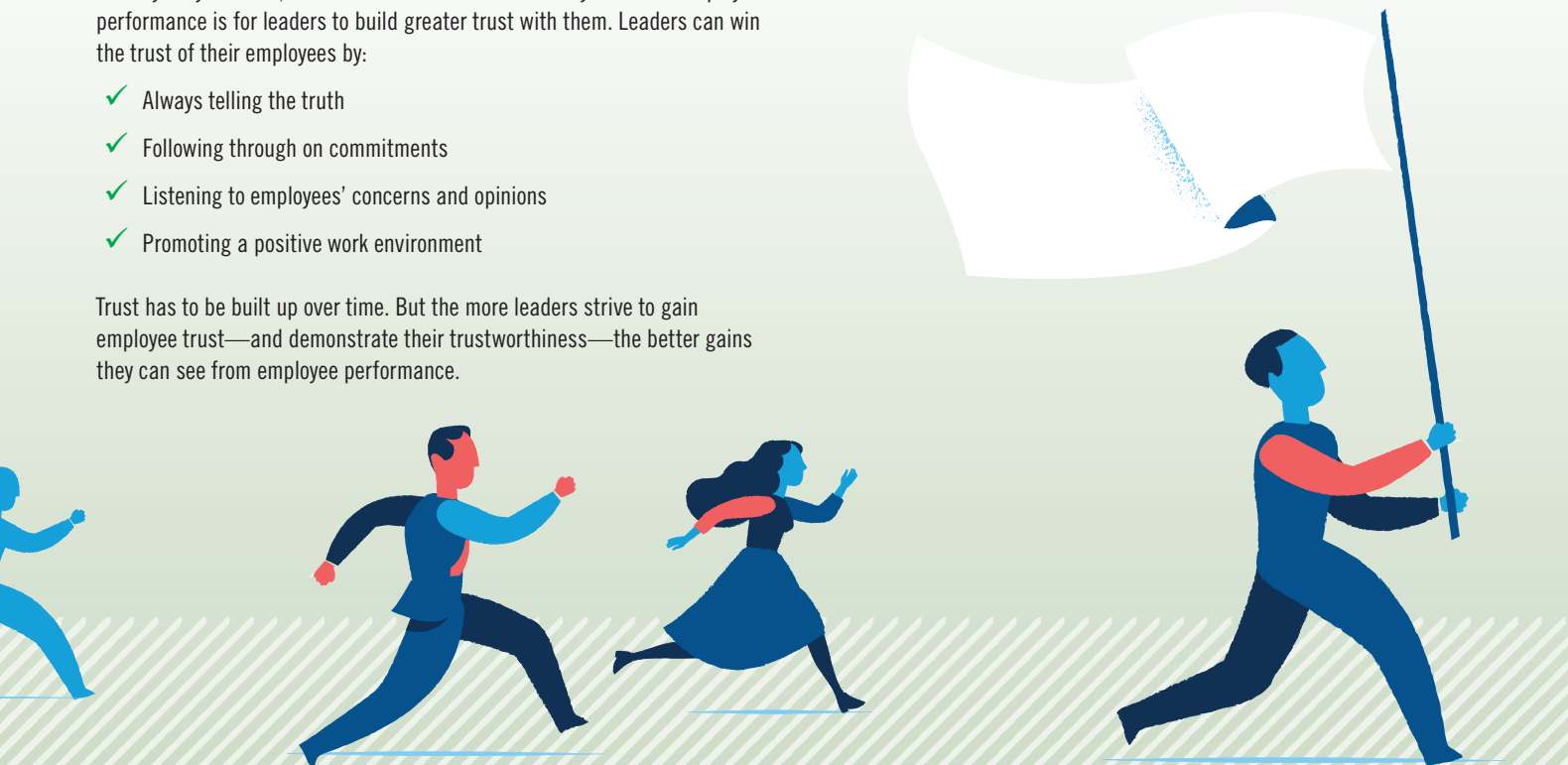
- ✓ Always telling the truth
- ✓ Following through on commitments
- ✓ Listening to employees’ concerns and opinions
- ✓ Promoting a positive work environment

Trust has to be built up over time. But the more leaders strive to gain employee trust—and demonstrate their trustworthiness—the better gains they can see from employee performance.

Leadership styles and trust both have a direct impact on employee performance. Different leadership approaches suit different situations, and it’s important for managers to understand how to implement the one that best fits the circumstances. At the same time, leaders must also work to increase trust so that employees are more engaged and empowered—and therefore more likely to take the initiative. ■

Alicia Wilde is a marketing specialist at JazzHR (www.jazzhr.com), where they’re on a mission to make recruiting and hiring easy, effective, and scalable no matter what growth looks like at your company. The Jazz Performer Platform doesn’t just help your company grow, it can help your recruiting process grow up, putting you on the path to hiring “Performers Only.”

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How HR Can Support Companies in Times of Crisis

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

When economic downturns, natural disasters, company reorganizations, and other challenges arise, companies depend on HR leaders to set policies, initiate support, and assist employees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, HR departments have been actively involved in their companies' decisions (such as slowing businesses, canceling conferences, and implementing new work arrangements) to slow the spread of the disease and to adjust to statewide and local social-distancing directives. By maintaining several key focus points, HR staff can more effectively lead their companies through this crisis.



1

REMAIN CALM

Like everyone else in a company, the members of the HR department are also employees who are affected by the pandemic. But because of its training and purview, HR is in a unique position to support organizations during a crisis. Therefore it's critical that HR staff refrain from panicking and instead find ways to remain calm (self-hypnosis, meditation, and exercise

are some useful strategies), help set the tone for the rest of the company, and get the information they need to help the organization get through this difficult time.



CREATE TALKING POINTS FOR MANAGERS AND TEAM MEMBERS

Employees are looking to their leaders to provide them with reassurance and answers during this crisis. HR staff can share only what they know, however, and it's important that managers and HR are on the same page with regards to what and how to communicate to the rest of the workforce. By creating talking points for managers to use, HR can help make sure that the company's messaging is both accurate and timely.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, one important topic that organizations need to address with their employees is how to cover employee absences in cases that do not qualify as sick days (such as having to self-quarantine) when those employees are unable to work from home. For example, several companies (including Warby Parker, REI, Columbia Sportswear,

and Patagonia) have issued public statements announcing that their stores and offices will be closed and that their employees will continue to be paid during those closures. These and similar announcements are key vectors for delivering two vital reassurances to employees: that their safety is important to the company, and that their financial security is important to the company.



COMPILE AND DISTRIBUTE A LIST OF SUPPORT SERVICES USEFUL DURING A CRISIS

In addition to the company's employee assistance program (EAP) hotline, this list should include contact information for local organizations that offer support for health services, childcare, and coping with emotional or financial stress. If business closures are taking place, the document could also include a list of open local stores that carry necessities (e.g., food, medications, cleaning supplies, toilet paper) and information about those stores' hours and whether they offer pickup or delivery options. (On a related note, giving employees time off to do necessary shopping is a small but meaningful way companies can support their teams, especially when local stores have limited hours and inventories.)



BE HUMAN

As the entire nation struggles through this public health crisis, this is the time when it's especially important for HR to step up and connect with employees. By offering an ear or a shoulder when needed and showing emotion and compassion, HR can play a vital role in helping everyone manage this challenging period together. Instead of requiring staff to come to work in unsafe conditions and continue face-to-face interactions with customers and applicants, HR and company leaders need to show their humanity and demonstrate more patience and empathy than ever before.



BE FLEXIBLE

The hope is that most communities won't be subjected to mandated or long-term quarantines. But many parts of

the country will be, and HR needs to be able to support the employees who are affected by such orders. For example, HR can proactively prepare for local school closures by developing ready-to-implement flexible schedules or work-from-home arrangements for employees who are parents of young children. Similarly, HR can create response plans for if a quarantine goes into effect or if an employee is exposed to the coronavirus or has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19.

The pandemic situation is rapidly evolving, and it's impossible to predict exactly how things will be a few months or even a few weeks out. In the face of so many unknowns, it's perfectly reasonable for company leadership to say "We don't know" as long as that's followed by "but we're working on a solution as fast we can." Now and during any crisis, it's critical to maintain high levels of communication and transparency, both of which are key to maintaining the trust of employees and helping everyone stay calm (and not panicked). One of HR's core responsibilities is to make sure that employees know that companies value them ahead of everything else. ■

Jessica Miller-Merrell is a workplace change agent focused on human resources and talent acquisition. She's also the founder of Workology (formerly Blogging4Jobs) and can be contacted on Twitter at @jmillmerrell.

How To UNLOCK REMOTE WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

BY SHANE METCALF

Until recently, few companies allowed their employees to work remotely (in fact, the very idea of telecommuting has been around only since 1973).¹ Because office optics determined how employees were perceived by their manager and coworkers, being “absent”—that is, not in the office—was seen as a clear indication that someone wasn’t contributing. But over the past few years, more and more companies have been rethinking their remote workforce policies and other cultural and performance strategies, and the exception is increasingly becoming the rule.

In its most recent (2017) *State of the American Workplace* report, Gallup found that 43 percent of employees work remotely (“away from their team members at least some of the time”), up from 39 percent four years earlier.² Since that report’s publication, the tide has turned even more, as employees increasingly demand

flexibility in their jobs and younger generations of managers are more willing to support working from home.³ As employers compete to hire and retain the best talent, they are taking note of this trend and including telecommuting capabilities or hybrid options in their employee benefits. At the same time, though, companies must also be sure to implement certain best practices and programs to increase their remote workforce engagement.

By intentionally developing a culture that binds employees into the fabric of the organization, leaders can improve retention, increase workforce engagement, and decrease the risk of burnout. This intentionality is essential when an employee works onsite—and even more so when an employee works remotely.

Although many employees desire the flexibility of working remotely, that arrangement comes with its own set of challenges, including feelings of isolation. Remote workers who aren’t included in the company culture won’t feel connected to the company’s purpose and will be “more likely to quit because of loneliness and low engagement.”⁴

By focusing on communication, performance management, culture building, and the effective use of technology, leaders can ensure that working remotely is a positive experience.

ESSENTIALS OF COMMUNICATION

In an office environment, it’s common for a manager to pull an employee into an impromptu meeting or ask coworkers questions when running into them in the hallway. Remote employees don’t have the same

opportunities for such casual conversations, though, and may miss out on information that isn’t considered “mission critical.” To ensure that remote team members feel included, it’s better for managers to *overcommunicate* with them.

When employees are dispersed, it can seem inconvenient to interrupt their work days with phone calls or texts, but this type of on-the-spot interaction is conducive to keeping those employees feeling involved. (One caveat: people *do* need uninterrupted times during the day to perform deep work.) While being respectful of remote workers’ time zones and work schedules, managers should make it a habit to connect with employees via video calls when any issues or concerns come up. These timely connections create more opportunities for the free flow of information and are essential for maintaining remote workforce engagement.

Meetings can be one of the most frustrating aspects of working as a remote employee. In many organizations, onsite staff meet in a conference room and the remote worker dials in and views the meeting via a small camera placed at the end of the conference table. Unfortunately, the people in the meeting room often dominate the conversation, making it difficult for the person who has dialed in to interject.

When conducting video calls, leaders or facilitators should be conscientious about including remote participants. If remote employees are not talking, leaders should explicitly invite them to share their opinions or knowledge with the group. Some companies have *all* meeting attendees (whether they work onsite or remotely) call in to meetings, which gives everyone the same perspective and opportunities to participate. Rather than leave one person feeling disconnected while staring at a video feed of a room full of



people, this practice puts everyone on a level playing field.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FROM AFAR

Managers can engage remote employees in much the same way they engage onsite employees, but with a heavier emphasis on consistent communication. Without the structure of weekly meetings, holding one another accountable becomes harder and harder. If the performance management process already includes continual feedback, those frequent one-on-one conversations (such as weekly check ins) can give managers and remote employees chances to get ahead of roadblocks before they arise.

When frequent communication is open enough, honest feedback is seen as encouragement, not micromanagement. Establishing a habit of interacting regularly alleviates the inevitable stress that accompanies conversations about performance and can improve overall workforce engagement. These one-on-one meetings also provide opportunities for ongoing career conversations. No matter where employees are located, they all have the same desire to grow and develop in their roles and with their companies.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF UNITY

Many companies fall into the trap of dividing employees into two categories: those who work remotely, and those who work at home. But that division only weakens the organization. To put the focus on achieving the company's mission, managers should instead create rituals that promote belonging and inclusivity.

Because all employees, including remote workers, start their employment journey with an onboarding process, the more the organization grows, the more necessary a structured onboarding program is. This process of introducing new hires to the company rules, practices, and culture sets the stage for a positive workplace experience and can play a huge role in how long a company is able to retain its remote workers.

Early immersion in company culture can increase employee engagement, and one way to accomplish this is to help workers get to know their colleagues. Remote employees rarely have the kinds of opportunities to connect with coworkers that onsite employees regularly enjoy. For example, when a remote employee calls in to a meeting, the discussion usually goes right to the agenda.

Consequently, remote employees don't get to participate in the pre- and post-meeting small talk among in-person attendees—the kinds of interactions that develop relationships that in turn build culture, create workforce engagement, and foster a more human experience at work for everyone.

When the ability to work remotely isn't a company-wide policy but determined by the department, it can be difficult for employees to empathize with coworkers they don't know. Managers should encourage both onsite and offsite employees to have "virtual coffee meetings" together so that all of their interactions with each other aren't strictly dedicated to work. "Buddy" systems and mentoring programs also help remote employees get to know people besides their direct managers.

When the members of a team aren't physically close to each other, leaders can build psychological closeness by creating spaces in which people can open up and be more vulnerable with each other. Celebrating individual and group wins is one effective strategy. During meetings, managers can ask everyone to share a positive experience or something interesting they've recently learned. They can also take the time to ask about employees' families, weekends, or vacations.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT

Allowing employees to work remotely without offering adequate technology support won't yield much success. At the very least, remote employees need to have frictionless access to the Internet, including video capabilities. Communications platforms (including instant messaging for quick conversations) help employees connect across the company, and video conferencing applications facilitate extended discussions. Employee-appreciation applications, too, can play a valuable role in culture building: it's easy to provide public or private kudos when all team members are onsite, but when team members are remote, these applications make it easier to intentionally recognize their accomplishments.

As new software platforms evolve, companies should consider which ones will enhance their employees' connections and relationships. These platforms shouldn't cause more confusion but should aim to alleviate common pain points that your employees are actively facing. Making use of up-and-coming technology will help workers and managers develop healthy relationships

with one another, no matter where they are located in the world. These relationships will help grow an organizational culture that brings out the best in a company's people.

As new technologies emerge and business needs evolve, remote workers will continue to grow as a segment of the workforce. In some sectors they may one day make up the majority of the employees; in others, perhaps only a fraction. Either way, all companies and managers will need to understand how to engage these workers in order to maximize their contributions to their organizations. ■

Shane Metcalf is the chief culture officer at 15Five, a continuous performance management software that includes weekly check-ins, objectives and key results (OKR) tracking, peer recognition, one-on-one meetings, and 360° reviews.

This article was reprinted with permission and originally appeared on the 15Five blog at www.15five.com/blog/remote-workforce-engagement/.

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LEARNING TO LOVE

Many companies are responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic by moving employees to work from home. These companies are showing that they care about their employees but also about protecting the broader community by flattening the “curve” of the spread of the coronavirus. But it’s not

These good-faith efforts to safeguard people by having employees work remotely must address multiple challenges:

- ➔ Organizations that haven’t enabled or promoted telework in the past may suddenly find themselves in unfamiliar situations with no existing structures to lean on.
- ➔ Teams may not know how to collaborate well when colleagues no longer sit across the table from each other.
- ➔ Leaders may not know how to check in on their people effectively when those employees are newly scattered throughout a region.
- ➔ Technology departments may not have outfitted employees with systems for remote, secure work and collaboration.
- ➔ Everyone (both leaders and employees) may be missing the camaraderie and community of a busy office just when people are hungrier than ever for connection and reassurance.

Tap smart collaboration tools—especially videoconferencing

Just because employees are isolated in their homes doesn’t mean that collaboration and communication must grind to a halt. Many cloud-based technologies can make working remotely as efficient and effective as working in a traditional office. Teleconferencing tools, in particular, are powerful for restoring social connections and offer much richer communication than e-mail, intranets, or phone calls alone. Seeing familiar faces on the screen, being able to read gestures and body language, and sharing documents “live” go a long way toward fostering community when people are separated from each other. In fact, one study found that decisions reached by videoconference have higher levels of collaboration compared to decisions made through phone calls or e-mail.¹

Communicate frequently (and not just about work)

Remote work arrangements can leave people feeling lonely, isolated, and adrift. The solution is plenty of communication. This means clear guidance from leaders as well as opportunities for employees to pose questions and offer ideas.

The exchanges shouldn’t be only about work, though. Especially if people will be working remotely for several weeks (or months), companies need to develop what consultant Kai Andrews calls “intentional remote culture.”

Don’t abandon the tenets that make your company culture unique. Hold regular virtual non-work-related meetings with your employees to talk about more casual topics. Identify “water cooler topic” leaders who can form virtual discussion groups around topics such as sports, movies, cooking, and much more. Employees can self-select into groups, and new connections will form while old connections are maintained.²



TELECOMMUTING

BY ED FRAUENHEIM

the pandemic by asking as many employees as possible if they are serious not only about caring for their own community, given the public health imperative to “flatten the curve,” but as easy as saying “just stay home and work.”

Set clear policies

When companies implement telecommuting, they should institute policies for it as well. Work hours present one obvious area of possible concern with a geographically decentralized workforce; organizations should establish expectations for being “on the clock” and communicate them clearly to remote workers. Companies should also provide guidance for teleconferencing etiquette (for example, on-camera eating is usually a no-no), with which many employees might lack previous experience. They should also expand support resources so employees don’t get frustrated about failed logins and other technical difficulties that prevent them from getting their work done.

Telework and trust

As the COVID-19 pandemic forces more and more companies to implement telecommuting, they have an opportunity to deepen the trust they have with their employees. Research published in fall 2019 found that about 80 percent of American employees would feel happier, less stressed, and more trusted if they could work remotely. The study also found that most employees who were given telecommute options were “more likely to recommend their company to a friend” and “less likely to leave their employer” than their office-bound colleagues.³ When a company trusts its remote employees to work in their own spaces, they usually repay that trust by doing great work.

Adapt—and continue to move forward

Many people are finding it challenging to implement the remote working arrangements that COVID-19 has forcibly—and suddenly—imposed on a huge portion of the American workforce. In addition to dealing with having a new workplace, some employees also have to juggle childcare now that the schools are closed, for example, or must care for other family members. As employees and organizations implement telecommuting, they are finding ways to work remotely in ways that are better for business, better for people, and better for communities. And when it is safe for everyone to work together in shared spaces again, perhaps companies and employees will have learned to love telecommuting.

Ed Fraenheim is the senior director of content at Great Place to Work, where he provides insights and shares stories about how great workplaces are better for business, better for people, and better for the world. He has spoken at numerous events; published articles in *Fortune*, *Wired*, and *Inc.*; and cowritten three books, including *A Great Place to Work for All*.

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MANAGING THE EXTERNAL WORKFORCE

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

For organizations to succeed in the talent space, they must implement all three steps of the “buy, build, and borrow” recruitment strategy. They need to hire employees from the outside (buy); develop talent from within the organization (build); and hire freelancers, contractors, and external service providers when necessary (borrow). The third group is particularly significant: with external workers making up 42 percent of the total workforce, companies need to be very clear specifically about when and how they will borrow.¹

“Borrow” Strategies

Organizations need to manage all of their resources well. But because the resources dedicated to the external workforce are significant, it’s even more important for companies to understand the best ways to utilize external services providers. Companies most frequently use the following two types of “borrow” strategies:

Project-based workers.

This is probably the most common type of external workforce. When organizations need a particular task done, instead of hiring a regular full-time employee for it they temporarily bring in a contractor or external service provider to handle the task. When the project is complete, the assignment ends and the contractor or external services provider leaves.

Extensions of the department.

When a company needs a relatively minor task done on a regular basis, it might be tempted to mash several such tasks together, call them a “job,” and hire a regular full-time person to handle them. But the problem is that the mashup of tasks isn’t really a “job”—and everyone knows it. In order to retain employees, HR professionals need to design jobs that give people meaningful work (that they want to do) and some sense of purpose and connection, because when jobs are designed poorly, employees will not feel connected to the organization—and they’ll leave. Therefore that minor task that needs to be completed on a regular basis is perfect for an external services provider who is looking for project-based work rather than a career path within an organization.

Regardless of which type of external workers a company “borrows,” managers need to make sure that both the workplaces and the assignments appeal to them. When contingent workers and external service providers are engaged and feel positive about the company and the work they are doing, they will be more likely to make the company’s needs a priority when it calls them.





THE MANAGER'S ROLE IN ENGAGEMENT

Just as managers play a big part in keeping regular full-time employees engaged, they play a big part of keeping external service providers engaged as well. By deploying the following four strategies, managers can more effectively keep their external workforces engaged.

UNDERSTAND the company's external workforce engagement philosophy and how to best leverage external workers (as well as supply-chain technologies) to get projects done.

UNDERSTAND and actively manage each external worker's agreement in terms of expectations, deliverables, time, fees, etc.

MONITOR the work products that external workers deliver and assess them for value, timeliness, reworks, etc.

UTILIZE the external worker cross-departmentally. This strategy could lead to greater collaboration, because the worker is already familiar with the organization, and possibly even better rates for the company.

As the talent market continues to challenge the business world, organizations often must rely on their external workforces in order to get things done. In order to maximize the benefits of using this talent pool, however, managers must be prepared to help them feel connected to—and engaged with—the organization. ■

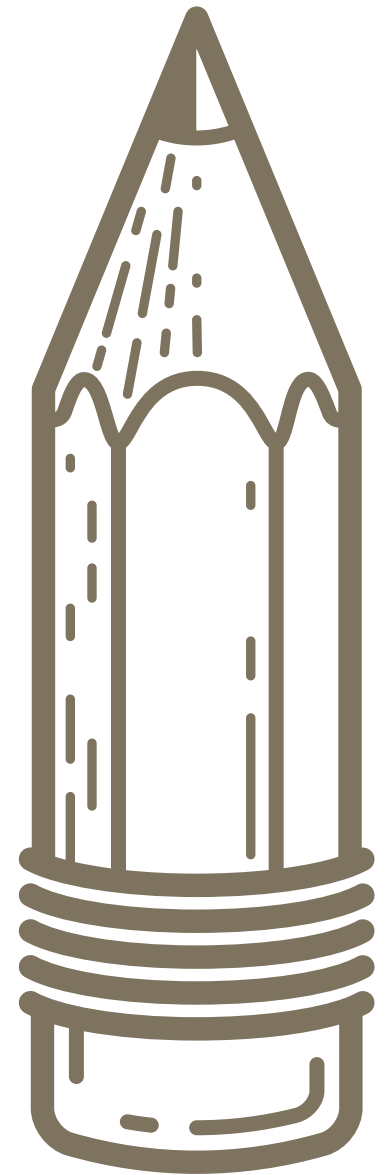
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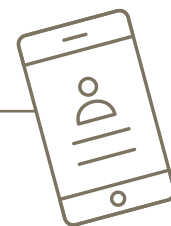
A BACK-TO-BASICS GUIDE TO PREBOARDING

BY JESSE FINN

Preboarding is a predominantly remote process that takes place after new hires sign their contracts and before they actually step into their new roles. As COVID-19 continues to present numerous challenges to recruitment, hiring, and business operations in general, it's more important than ever for companies to have robust preboarding processes in place. When companies bring on staff with very short lead-in times, good preboarding enables them to make the most of those periods and empowers new hires to hit peak productivity as soon as possible. And when companies are pushing out start dates because their sales pipelines have slowed, a robust preboarding process that enables them to keep in touch with new hires can make the difference between retaining them and losing them.



In either scenario, certain key preparations can enable a company to dramatically improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of its preboarding process:



BUILD A NEW HIRE DOCUMENTATION PACK

This should contain all the paperwork that's relevant to new hires, such as legal forms, documents about employee perks and benefits, and the company's social media policy. Send it out as one big packet, or drip-feed the documents separately to the new hires over the course of the preboarding journey.



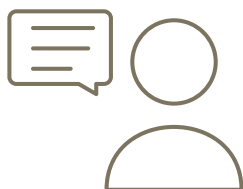
GET AHEAD OF THE TECH GAME

As soon as possible after people are hired, find out what kind of technology they will need and start lining it up so they can start working from day one and not lose valuable time wading through technical issues. By filling out a "tech and specs" form, new hires can indicate their preferences for company-provided computers, phones, software, etc. (And to streamline things even more, the company should have the selected items delivered to new hires' homes several days before they start work.)

Also, the use of a business-wide password manager (such as LastPass) can make it easier for all employees—and especially remote workers, who can't ask a nearby colleague for help—to access the company's applications and data.

GO VIRTUAL WITH THE MEET & GREET

Create a virtual introduction hub for new hires by asking their new team members to record short self-introductions of themselves (they don't have to be fancy—videos made with phones are fine) and upload them to a company intranet page or onboarding application.



New hires can use this online directory to learn about their new colleagues and reach out to them if they have any questions. (And of course the new hires should contribute their own introductory videos as well!)

GET A LEG UP ON THE FAQ

New hires usually have a lot of questions. Instead of answering them in real time, put together a comprehensive FAQ that's hosted either on the company's intranet or in its onboarding app or sent directly to new hires as a PDF.



A robust preboarding process can help new hires hit the ground running and become productive employees much faster. As the global community navigates through staffing and production delays, large shifts toward work-from-home arrangements, and other unanticipated challenges, this process is becoming increasingly important. By taking the time to develop a comprehensive preboarding strategy—and executing it consistently—companies can better weather uncertain times. ■

Jesse Finn is the community content manager at Talmundo (www.talmundo.com), an employee onboarding solution for HR teams that allows businesses to create a custom self-service platform where new hires can view content relating to the company and their role, complete onboarding assessments, view progress, communicate with colleagues, access roadmaps, fill in online forms, and more.



*What Companies Get Wrong
About Reskilling*

THE REWORK EDITORS

Thanks to the effects of AI and automation, an estimated 375 million workers may need to switch jobs by 2030.¹ These changes will surely reshape the working world, but the outlook isn't all doom and gloom. Companies can have some control by proactively preparing their workforces through "reskilling (learning new skills for a new position) or upskilling (learning current tasks more deeply)."² Unfortunately, although business leaders and employees alike are well aware of the impending digital revolution, most executives have not yet started such preparations or are simply getting it wrong.³ ReWork recently chatted with Vikita Poindexter, the owner of Poindexter Consulting Group (a full-service human resource consulting firm), and asked her to explain the crucial missteps that organizations are taking and what they should be doing to prepare their workforces for the future work scene.

They Don't Identify their Needs

Poindexter says the number one thing companies get wrong when attempting to broaden or improve their employees' skills is that they don't know what their specific needs are: "Oftentimes we forget that the employees already have a considerable amount of knowledge. So before you just jump into reskilling, you really need to identify the need, the goal, and how we get there."

One way a company can identify its needs is to use technology-based tools to take an inventory of what skills their employees currently have, which in turn lets it see what gaps need to be addressed. (Such gaps may not always be obvious: many organizations *think* they need to improve their workers' technological capabilities when in reality they *should* prioritize the critical-thinking skills that will become increasingly valuable as AI replaces repetitive, predictable tasks.) Employers can also use these tools to develop individual "learning journeys" to help workers prepare for shifting roles or completely different jobs.

They Wait Until They See a Decline in Skills

Another way companies miss the mark is by not being proactive. Instead, Poindexter says, they take action only when they see a decline or a large gap that needs to be filled. When this happens, it's usually a function of not remaining engaged with employees at every level: "When we're at a point where we must retrain or reskill, it's often because we haven't done our due diligence and taken an analysis of what's going wrong."

So how can companies get ahead of potential setbacks? One solution is to implement a continuous review process (or tune up the company's existing review process) to open up the lines of communication. Poindexter also suggests sending out company-wide questionnaires to ask employees for their candid thoughts about where they think they are in terms of skill sets and what areas the company needs to address. She also recommends that companies invest in new skilling, a new process in which "AI-based adaptive learning systems [are used] to accelerate workforce development through personalized lessons, coaching, and feedback."⁴

They Fail to Get Employees Involved

Lastly, Poindexter says, companies make a big mistake when they don't get employees involved in the reskilling process from the beginning: "Companies are reskilling and then telling workers 'this is what the expectation is' without soliciting their buy-in. Oftentimes, it'll backfire, because you'll start getting resentment from employees."

To gain employees' trust, Poindexter suggests that companies convene focus groups to weigh in on the strategic process of retraining before the implementation phase begins. The makeup of the groups will depend on how large the company is but should reflect the interests of every team. Therefore they should include people from each department (one from marketing, one from IT, etc.) and represent all positions and pay grades (minimum-wage workers, mid-level team leaders, senior-level managers, etc.) within the organization.

With those who are managing this task, these groups should discuss goals and what the reskilling processes should look like. Focus group members should feel free to communicate each department's concerns and provide suggestions for moving forward. At the same time, when the reskilling or upskilling process starts, those in upper management and the C-suite should regularly check in with every department so that all employees feel visible and valued. Once they have a reskilling plan and employee buy-in for it, companies should keep workers engaged by offering a combination of both classroom-style training as well as independent online courses to appeal to different learning styles.

Tomorrow's business landscape will look very different from the one of today. In order to remain competitive, companies will need workers who have the new skills and capabilities that this landscape will require. Rather than wait until they have no choice but to address that need, companies should take a proactive approach and start making those preparations now. ■

Published by CornerStone, the *ReWork* blog is a guide to the changing talent-management industry and helps executives and HR leaders succeed in the new, technology-driven economy.

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What Will Become the “Regular” Normal?

BY MIKE MCKERNS

Will the “new” normal that has emerged during COVID-19 pandemic simply be the “regular” normal one year from now? That depends on what you’re talking about.

We know that online learning won’t last forever. At this time next year, the kids should all be back in school, much to the relief of parents who are struggling to balance having their kids at home all day (and giving them the attention and care they need) and trying to complete their own projects while working from home.

The restaurants and shops should be fully open for business again by next spring too. Although curbside pickup and food delivery are quick and convenient and options for which I am very grateful during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-restaurant dining is impossible, I (like much of the rest of the population, I’m sure!) am really looking forward to once again being able to spend a couple of hours socializing with friends in a restaurant.

But the business world . . . well, that’s the big unknown.

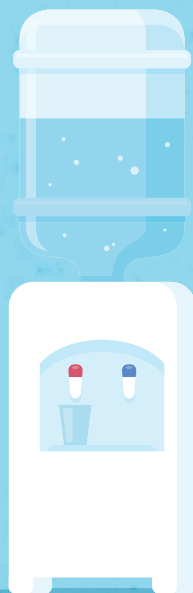
Although many sectors have embraced telecommuting to some degree or another over the past couple of decades, most companies have not made working from home an option for the majority of their employees—until now, that is. As social distancing and “stay at home” decrees have become widespread, many businesses have had no choice but to permit their workforces to telecommute.

And so far, it’s been working. Sure, there are occasional glitches—slow Internet speeds, conference calls that are interrupted by barking dogs in the background or children who need their parents’ help with something, etc. But people have been figuring out to handle those curveballs and have even learned how to take crazy Zoom backgrounds and barking dogs in stride.

But once the pandemic subsides and people can return to their offices, will they?

I think that a lot of companies are realizing that telecommuting can work really well when the right technology and processes are in place. If people can get their work done just as well (or better!) from home than from the office—especially once their kids are back at school and not underfoot—why wouldn’t companies continue to let them do it? Once workers get a taste of what working remotely is really like, those who thrive in such an environment may push to have that arrangement included in the next contracts they sign—and organizations may have to be flexible on that point if they want to attract (or keep) top talent.

The nation’s involuntary work-from-home experiment is proving that telecommuting actually can work in many cases for which it was not previously considered an option. It remains to be seen if the post-pandemic business world returns to the predominantly “in the office” structure or if telecommuting will become the “new” normal.



MUJADARA

For those days when your fridge is bare and you don’t feel like going to the store but still want to put together a healthy, satisfying, and flavorful meal, it’s always a great idea to have a few go-to recipes that rely on pantry staples. One of the best of the bunch is mujadara, a dish based on lentils, rice, and caramelized onions that is found throughout the Middle East.

YIELD: 6 servings

TIME: about 90 minutes

WHAT YOU’LL NEED:

1 cup of lentils (brown or green, not black), soaked in warm water for 30 minutes

½ cup of olive oil

4 onions, thinly sliced

½ tsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground coriander

1 tsp salt

¾ cup brown rice

Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving

Calories: 344 cal

Fat: 90.8 g

Dietary fiber: 12.4 g

Sugars: 3.8 g

Protein: 11.6 g

DIRECTIONS

1. Drain the lentils, then put them in a large saucepan with enough fresh water to cover. Bring to a boil, then simmer for about 20 minutes (until the lentils are cooked but still firm). Drain.
2. While the lentils are cooking, heat the olive oil in a Dutch oven. Add the onions, cumin, coriander, and salt. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until the onions are softened and turn dark brown (about 20 minutes).
3. Stir in the rice and brown it in the oil for a minute. Then add the lentils and 3 cups of water. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer for about 30 minutes.
4. Turn off the heat, and keep the lid on the pot for another 5 minutes so the rice can steam.

The basic recipe is delicious as is, but consider trying some of these additions to tweak the flavor profile:

- Top with chopped fresh herbs. (Parsley is a classic accompaniment, though mint is also nice!)
- Serve with a dollop of plain Greek yogurt or a handful of crumbled feta.
- Stir in some raisins and toasted pine nuts right before serving.

THE RESOURCE

SERVICES GUIDE

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